

THE SECRET OF PLATO'S ATLANTIS

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The Secret of Plato's Atlantis by John Francis Arundell

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JOHN FRANCIS ARUNDELL

**THE SECRET OF
PLATO'S ATLANTIS**

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SECRET OF PLATO'S ATLANTIS.

BY

LORD ARUNDELL OF WARDOUR,

AUTHOR OF

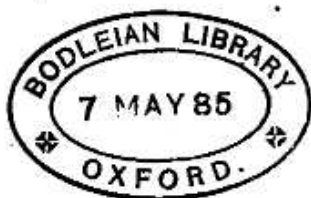
"TRADITION, PRINCIPALLY WITH REFERENCE TO MYTHOLOGY AND THE LAW OF
NATIONS;" "THE SCIENTIFIC VALUE OF TRADITION;" "THE NATURE
MYTH UNREARABLE FROM THE SCRIPTURAL POINT OF VIEW."

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PREFACE.

THE following pages were written for the *Month*, but in the course of writing extended themselves beyond the limits of a magazine article; the third chapter more particularly becoming too elaborate in form for suitable publication in a periodical. I have, therefore, preferred to publish them separately. As, however, it would have involved too much trouble to have rewritten and recast the articles, I have printed them in their original form, as addressed to the readers of the *Month*.

The subject, at least, is a curious and interesting one; and Mr. Donnelly's work, which was the occasion of the articles being written, contains much curious speculation, and is written in a style calculated to give zest to the inquiry. It has had a wide circulation.

I cannot expect the same circulation for this little volume, more especially as the theory it offers is not of the same romantic and popular character; but I hope it may contribute something towards the solution of an interesting and difficult question.

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PLATO'S ATLANTIS.

CHAPTER I.

PLATO'S ATLANTIS—MR. DONNELLY'S THEORY.

A BOOK which is now (1883) in its seventh edition seems to claim some reply from the point of view of Tradition. It is entitled *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World*,* and, in fact, announces that the Deluge, in which we have hitherto believed and have called universal, at any rate to the extent of the destruction of all mankind,† did not really occur, but that the subsidence of the island or continent of Atlantis at some indefinite period was attended by very similar circumstances, and that it is the tradition of this catastrophe which has somehow spread through all countries, which has created the impression of a universal deluge; in other words, that there was a deluge, but a deluge as revealed according to Plato, and not according to Moses.

The evidence which Mr. Donnelly has accumulated, both as to the diluvian tradition and also as to the common

* *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World*. By Ignatius Donnelly. 7th edition. (Sampson Low) London, 1883.

† This chapter was written previously to the controversy on the Deluge in the pages of the *Tablet* in the year 1884. I am not, however, aware that anything transpired in that controversy which would require me to retract or modify any statement in the present paper. If so, I shall be obliged to any one who will put his finger on it.

origin, at any rate, of the civilised nations "on both sides of the Atlantic," is by no means inconsiderable; and it will be seen that, in so far as he fails to sustain his special theory of the submerged Atlantis, his convictions, facts, and testimonies must pass to the account or lapse to the inheritance of what I have regarded as the tradition of the human race.

As it is always safer and fairer to present the theory of an author in his own words so far as may be possible, I will give the principal heads under which Mr. Donnelly summarises the purpose of his work. I shall have occasion, at any rate indirectly, to refer to the omitted headings in the course of this discussion :

"1. That there once existed in the Atlantic Ocean, opposite the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea, a large island, which was the remnant of an Atlantic continent, and known to the ancient world as Atlantis. 2. That the description of this island given by Plato is not, as has been long supposed, fable, but veritable history. 3. That Atlantis was the region where man first rose from a state of barbarism to civilisation. 4. That it became in the course of ages a populous and mighty nation, from whose overflowings the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi, the Amazon, the Pacific coast of South America, the west coast of Europe and Africa, the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Caspian were populated by civilised nations. 5. That it was the true antediluvian world—the Garden of Eden, the Garden of the Hesperides, the Elysian Fields, the Garden of Alcinoüs, the Mesomphalos, the Olympos, the Asgard of the traditions of ancient nations; representing a universal memory of a great land where early mankind dwelt for ages in peace and happiness. . . . 12. That Atlantis perished in a terrible convulsion of nature, in which the whole island sank into the ocean, and nearly all its inhabitants. 13. That a few persons escaped in ships and on rafts, and carried to the nations east and west the tidings of the appalling catastrophe, which has survived to our own time in the Flood and Deluge legends of the different nations of the old and the new worlds."

In this theory there are two distinct propositions:

(1) that an island or continent of Atlantis existed, and

sank in the ocean; (2) and that this submersion was the origin of the various diluvian legends which are found in all parts of the world.

The legend of Atlantis can hardly be asserted even by Mr. Donnelly to be the tradition of the human race, for he himself terms it "a novel proposition."

"The fact that the story of Atlantis was for thousands of years regarded as a fable proves nothing. There is an unbelief which grows out of ignorance as well as a scepticism which is born of intelligence. . . . For a thousand years it was believed that the legends of the buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were myths. . . . There was a time when the expedition sent out by Necho to circumnavigate Africa was doubted, because the explorers stated that, after they had progressed a certain distance, the sun was north of them. This circumstance, which then aroused suspicion, now proves to us that the Egyptian navigators had really passed the equator, and anticipated by 2100 years Vasquez da Gama in his discovery of the Cape of Good Hope" (p. 3).

On the other hand, although it does not appear that Mr. Donnelly himself believes in the inspiration of Genesis, yet the fact that it has been so believed by many millions in many parts of the world during a long continuance of years must stand for something as against a theory.

As it is my wish to confine my argument to the limits of historical tradition, I should have been willing to have accepted Mr. Donnelly's first proposition, viz. that Atlantis existed and subsided, at any rate *pro argumento*, if historical investigation had not destroyed the *primâ facie* evidence which seemed to compel or invite the inquiry. This, however, is a point which the reader must decide. Apart, however, from the historical evidence, I must remark that Mr. Donnelly's theory is opposed, from their several points of view, by Mr. Wallace, Mr. Darwin, and Professor Geikie (*vide* Wallace's *Island Life*, chap. vi. 11).

Mr. Wallace's argument is not, it is true, addressed to